



2016 Inductee  
to the  
South Carolina  
Academy of Authors

Prolific writer of children's literature, Betsy Cromer Byars of Seneca, South Carolina, writes that it's 1931 and "I make a discovery that changes my life." Byars says what she realized was "You can take ABC's and make words!" She continues with how learning to rollerskate provided her means to visit the library. An impassioned reader, she has advised children who want to write: "Read!" Today, Byars' books appear on the American Library Association's "best books" list.

Her novel *The Summer of the Swans* (1970) is recognized statewide, nationally, and internationally. The poignant story presents characters Sara, a young teen filled with angst directed at herself, and Charlie, her brain-damaged brother who is fascinated by swans on a nearby lake. The book received the Newberry Medal (1971) and was made into a film.

Other books include *The Night Swimmers* (1980) that received the American Book Award for children's fiction and *The Not-Just-Anybody Family* (1986). There, replete in heartwarming humor, readers meet three siblings coping while mom's on a rodeo tour. *Wanted . . . Mud Blossom* (1991), also in the Blossom Family series, has garnered multiple accolades, including an Edgar Award for best young people's mystery. Another delightful Byars' series is *The Herculeab Jones Mysteries*.

With daughters Betsy Duffey and Laurie Myers, Byars also wrote *Dog Diaries* (2007) and *Cat Diaries* (2010), stories told by dogs from around the world and by the Meow Society, respectively.

Born in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1928, Betsy Cromer attended Furman University (1946-1948); graduated from Queens College with a degree in English; married Edward Ford Byars (professor, writer, and pilot); raised three daughters and a son; began writing magazine articles at her kitchen table; then turned to writing children's literature; published her first book, *Clementine* (1962); and got her pilot license in 1983.

She went on to write dozens of stories underscored by memorable characters: boys who are pensive, girls who are realistic, and animals (like the tenderly-rendered fox, "light and free as the wind" when Tommy observes her in *The Midnight Fox*). Byars' characters, together with literary elements like point of view ("more limited than omniscient"); plot ("unpredictable"); tone ("gently humorous" and "without condescension"); theme ("life is complicated"), produce literature that is more than the sum of its parts. Thus, Betsy Cromer Byars' "ABC's" continue to inspire children and adults. —Ellen E. Hyatt



*Betsy Cromer Byars*